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In Memory

OF

WILLIAM WHEWELL, D.D.

MASTER OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,

A SERMON

PREACHED

IN THE COLLEGE CHAPEL,

ON SUNDAY, MARCH 18th, 1866.

BY

J. B. LIGHTFOOT, D.D.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, AND HULSEAN PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

Cambridge and London:  
MACMILLAN AND CO.

1866.

Price One Shilling.



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*THE delay in the publication of this Sermon needs explanation. Having arranged to leave England immediately after its delivery, I was unable to see it through the press before my departure. On my return it has been placed in the printer's hands with as little loss of time as possible.*

*J. B. L.*





TO

THE MASTER, FELLOWS, AND SCHOLARS  
OF TRINITY COLLEGE,

*This Sermon*

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.





# A SERMON,

&c.

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1 CORINTHIANS XV. 32.

*If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me? If the dead rise not, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.*

IN an earlier passage of this Epistle St Paul compares the career of the Apostles to a scene in a Roman amphitheatre. He imagines a vast concourse brought together from all ages and climes; Greek and Barbarian, Roman and Jew, the living and the dead, dwellers on earth and denizens of heaven, the whole universe of sentient beings, assembled in one countless multitude to witness the spectacle prepared for them. Tier beyond tier, they stretch away into the far distance, till the eye loses itself in the dizzy indistinguishable throng, fading at length into a faint haze, a quivering glow, of sentient life. And while they thus broaden out in wedge-like masses into the infinitude of space and time, every face and every eye of this vast multitude is concentrated on the lists below. There at the

command of the Omnipotent King, who presides over the spectacle, drawn forth from the obscurity of the dark prisons where they have been reserved until the given signal, and exposed to the curious gaze of these thronging myriads, the Apostles come forward to do His behest. Chained to the car of Christ, they had swollen the train which attended the victor's triumphant progress<sup>1</sup>: and now they are condemned to the fate of the vanquished and enslaved. Patriarchs and prophets, priests and kings, have fought in this same arena. But the interest of the combat is intensified, the spectacle has reached its climax, as they—the Apostles—last step forth, naked and defenceless, at the Almighty President's word, to do battle with the well-trained and well-armed gladiators of the world, or to grapple with the fierce monsters of ignorance and sin. Then indeed this vast amphitheatre is instinct with eager expectation: the eyes of all are bent down on the impending struggle; some with a savage thirst for blood, some with the scorn of an impartial curiosity, some with tender pitiful sympathy. It is a fearful ordeal; to fight against such antagonists, to fight thus unarmed, to fight under the scorching gaze of this multitudinous throng.

So may we venture to draw out the image

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 14—16; Ephes. iv. 8.

contained in the Apostle's words, 'I think God hath set forth us the Apostles last, as men condemned to death; for we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and to men.' Nor condemned as common captives or common criminals only, but as the lowest refuse of humanity, the scapegoats of their race and time, too vile to live, fit only for the cruel sports of the arena, if by chance the wrath of the offended powers might be appeased by their destruction; 'We are made as the filth of the world, as the offscouring of all things'¹.

Once again, in the words which I have chosen for my text, the Apostle returns to this striking similitude. As he argues against those who doubted or denied the immortality of man, the resurrection from the dead, he appeals to this great moral spectacle, as the witness of the human conscience to something more real and more enduring than earthly pleasures or pains. 'Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?' Is it conceivable that a man should be willing to die daily; to give up all that makes life enjoyable and to be ready to give up life itself; to contend in this arena of a profligate Asiatic capital, a focus and stronghold of heathendom; to stake his life on the issue of an unequal struggle with the savage monsters let loose upon him, with the concentrated force of an ancient and popular

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 9, 13.



superstition, with the selfish zeal of a wealthy and powerful craft, with the ignorant fury of an excited mob; unless he looked through the near considerations of earthly loss and gain, and saw the heavens opening beyond. Why else should he adopt a course so foolish and suicidal? 'If after the manner of men,' if regarding only transient mundane interests, 'I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me?' If this world be all, if heaven be a shadow and hell a fable, then a sane man cannot hesitate for a moment: 'If the dead rise not, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.'

It is a sublime conception, this amphitheatre of the universe contemplating the struggles and sufferings of a handful of feeble persecuted outcasts. It would be a bold hyperbole, if the crisis had been less critical, the issues less important. But if, as we believe, this was the turning-point of the world's history, if Christ indeed came down from heaven to bring life and immortality to light, if to the Apostles was entrusted the greatest work which has ever taxed the courage and the energies of man, then the occasion cannot be held at all unworthy of the image.

But though the work of the Apostles was so far an exceptional work, though the image thus appropriate could not be applied without exaggeration to any less signal contest, yet it may

be taken in some measure to describe the career of the benefactors of mankind, the servants of God, in all ages. The concourse is still assembled; the lists are still open. The same fight must be fought; the same antagonists vanquished. And according as the crisis grows in importance, as the strain on the individual combatant increases, as the antagonism gathers strength and fury, as through obloquy and contempt and persecution the heroic champion of God fights his way to the right and to the truth, just so far may it be said of him, that like the Apostles of old he has been 'set forth as one condemned to death;' has been 'made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.'

But from this vast bewildering concourse of earth and heaven, let us turn to the little amphitheatre which immediately surrounds us, and concentrate our thoughts on the narrow lists in which we ourselves are 'set forth' to slay or be slain. Even within these limits the assemblage of spectators is sufficiently large and august to awe and stimulate us. A history of more than three centuries gazes down upon our arena. A gathering of great men, such as probably no other College can show within the same period—historians, poets, statesmen, scholars, divines, interpreters of law, investigators of truth, preachers of righteousness—a

long line of spiritual and intellectual ancestry—witnesses our combats. This may be a matter of honest pride and congratulation; or it may be our deepest humiliation, our darkest reproach. Their name, their lustre, their example, are our inheritance; to drag in the dust, or to crown with fresh glory. In the presence of this silent concourse of the past we are called forth by God to do battle for Him.

One honoured name has been recently withdrawn from the lists of the combatants and added to the ranks of the spectators. Our grand old Master—our pride and strength—has passed from us to them. It is very hard to realize the change. His vacant stall, our mourning badges, speak to us in vain. We can think of him only as we saw him, not so very many days ago, still buoyant and vigorous and full of life; ‘his eye not dim, nor his natural force abated;’ his step still firm and his carriage erect as ever. All, who observed him of late, rejoiced to see that the shadow which had darkened the last year of his life was passing off. Old studies thrown aside were taken up again. Old interests blunted by sorrow were recovering their keen edge once more. Time seemed only to have mellowed and ripened his character, without decaying his faculties. The screen, which long had hidden his large capacity



of affection and strong yearning for sympathy, known to a few and suspected by many more, was falling away. And he, whom all admired and respected, was becoming every day better known and more endeared to all.

By all members of this College far and wide, even by those to whom he was personally unknown, his death will be felt as a personal loss. To us here it has left a sense of vacancy, which before it occurred we could hardly have imagined. So many various interests were linked with his name. So many cherished associations are buried in his grave. His removal seems like a great severance from the past.

Even if he had not risen to any special eminence, still by his unbroken residence of more than fifty years in the College, and by his high position as ruler of our little commonwealth, he would have been so intimately associated with the every day thoughts and acts, would have occupied so large a space in our memory, that his death must have been deeply felt. But he was recognized by all as no common man. If we are inclined to distrust our own estimate, as the partial expression of College pride, in this instance at least the appeal to a larger public will not reverse our verdict. In his published works he has covered a wider field than any living writer; and those, who have conversed with him in private, record

with wonder his familiar acquaintance with the farthest outlying regions of knowledge in its lower as well as in its higher forms. What value will be attached by after-ages to his various literary and scientific works, it would be vain to predict; but this at least we may say, that in his own generation and country he has held the foremost rank, if not in precision, at least in range and vigour of intellect.

And these great powers he consecrated always to the highest ends. He is ever a religious teacher in the truest sense. One strain runs through all his works; one cord threads together his earlier and later writings; the days of his literary life are 'bound each to each by natural piety.' The world of matter without, the world of thought within, alike speak to him of the Eternal Creator, the Beneficent Father. These are the strophe and antistrophe of the sublime chorus of Nature; the two witnesses who prophesy before the throne of the God of Revelation. If with the Psalmist he tells how 'The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His handywork,' with the Psalmist also he passes on from the outward witness of creation to the inward witness of the heart, 'The law of the Lord is an undefiled law converting the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure and giveth wisdom to the simple<sup>1</sup>.' The

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xix. 1, 7.

evidences of Natural Theology formed the subject of his earliest writing by which he became widely known, his Bridgewater Treatise. And this same chord he struck in his last sermon preached in this Chapel not many days before his fatal accident; when choosing a theme strangely prophetic, as it seems now, of his approaching death, and speaking of Him 'who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending,' he passed on from the creation of the world to its dissolution; and in words of striking force thus painted the great and final crisis; 'No mountains sinking under the decrepitude of years or weary rivers ceasing to rejoice in their courses'; 'No placid euthanasia silently leading on the dissolution of the natural world.' 'But the trumpet shall sound; the struggle shall come. This goodly frame of things shall expire amid the throes and agonies of some fierce and sudden catastrophe. And the same arm that plucked the elements from the dark and troubled slumbers of their chaos shall cast them into their tomb<sup>1</sup>.'

On such subjects he wrote often: sometimes with startling boldness, but always with deep reverence. Indeed his tone seems to rise in solemnity, as his speculations grow more daring; for what nobler passage can be shown in poet

<sup>1</sup> From a Sermon preached on Quinquagesima Sunday, Feb. 11th, upon the text Rev. i. 8.



or philosopher or divine, than the majestic language in which, speaking of the 'waste' of Creation, he suggests that the other bodies of the universe are 'rolled into forms of symmetry and order, into masses of light and splendour, by the vast whirl which the original creative energy imparted to the luminous elements out of which they were formed;' and describes the planets and stars as 'the lamps which have flown from the potter's wheel of the Great Worker; the shred-coils which in the working sprang from His mighty lathe; the sparks which darted from His awful anvil when the solar system lay incandescent thereon; the curls of vapour which rose from the great cauldron of Creation when its elements were separated<sup>1</sup>.'

But while the world without will judge him only by his writings, on our gratitude he has other and stronger claims. During the last quarter of a century, in which he has ruled over us, the College has enjoyed almost unexampled prosperity. How far this is due to the greatness of his name and the generosity of his administration, it would not be easy to decide. But after making all allowance for the fond partiality of a recent regret, we may fairly say that as a Master of the College he stands out pre-eminent in the long list of three centuries; as a man of letters, greatest of all since Bentley; as

<sup>1</sup> *Plurality of Worlds*, pp. 365, 366.

a munificent and patriotic ruler, greatest of all since Nevile ; but, as uniting in himself many and various qualifications which combined go far towards realizing the ideal head of a religious and learned foundation, the just representative of a famous academic body, greater than these or any of his predecessors. Vast and varied mental powers, untiring energy and extensive knowledge, integrity of character and strictness of example, a wide and generous munificence, a keen interest in University progress, an intense devotion to his own College, a strong sense of duty, a true largeness of heart, a simple Christian faith ; the union of these qualities fairly entitles him to the foremost place among the Masters of Trinity.

For he was most truly our own ; our own by long residence, our own in all his feelings and interests, our own in his passionate love for the place. He has been heard to say that the sky always seemed to him brighter, when framed by the walls and turrets of our Great Court ; and in his dying hours he desired to have the blinds raised, that he might look once more on this familiar scene, so fair and pleasant to his eyes. This touching incident of his last illness is typical of his whole life. All the currents of his being seemed to set towards this one channel. He delighted to connect the incidents of his domestic life with the College. He inspired his

private friends with his own enthusiasm for the College. He was very proud of Trinity, and Trinity was very proud of him.

Our own always ; not in his triumphs only, but in his sorrows also. I cannot forget—I do not think that any one who saw him can forget—how on this same Sunday a year ago, in the earliest hours of loneliness, in the first flush of grief, he appeared in this Chapel to join his prayers with ours, rightly judging this the fittest place for the weary and heavy-laden, not shrinking from us as from strangers, nor fearing to commit to our sympathies the saddest of all sad sights, an old man's bereavement and a strong man's tears.

I have spoken of his College feeling ; but College feeling with him was not a proud isolation, a repulsive narrowness. If he represented the College, he represented the University not less truly. His College was to him only the centre and focus from which his interest radiated. As in his last princely bequest to the University<sup>1</sup>, so in all the acts of his academic life, he regarded Trinity College as holding a great trust for the benefit of that larger body of which it forms a part, from which it derives strength, and to which it communicates strength in turn.

He has gone from us, leaving as a legacy his name and his munificence. He has bequeathed

<sup>1</sup> See Note A.

to us also his bright example. His race is run : his torch has passed into our hands full burning ; to keep ablaze or to quench, as we will. In intellectual eminence we cannot follow him. But the moral qualities, which clustered about his mental power, may be imitated even by the least gifted among us. The unflagging energy which overcame all disadvantages, the manly courage which ever disdained unworthy applause, the simple faith in God through Christ which in him was thrown into stronger relief by his large acquaintance with all branches of human knowledge ; such qualities as these are not beyond the reach of any. His example supplies a fresh incentive, as it imposes a fresh responsibility.

The Master's death occupies the first place in our thoughts. But this is not the only loss we have sustained during the last fortnight. While we were committing his remains to their final resting-place, an older contemporary—a gentle and loving spirit—was passing silently away. He too, though unknown to most of us, had spent the best part of his life in this place, and devoted his freshest energies to the College. He was a scholar, as those bear witness who heard him here, 'a ripe and good one ;' but he was very much more than a scholar. As a Tutor of this busy College, and as a parish cler-



gyman in his quiet northern home, he was one and unchanged ; the same pure, single-hearted, blameless man, humble and childlike, loving and loved by all. His words were the counterpart of his deeds ; his books the reflexion of his life. In the Rectory of Valehead and the Bishopric of Souls was traced the unconscious portrait of the Vicar of Heversham<sup>1</sup>.

As each successive combatant is withdrawn from the lists, as we lay first one and then another in an honoured grave, the question will rise in our hearts, 'To what end are these well-fought battles, these hardly-won victories?' If true life is, as not only the Christian Apostle but even the Stoic philosopher<sup>2</sup> called it, a warfare ; if men praise and honour most after death those who in their lifetime grappled with difficulties, conquered unruly passions in themselves, subdued ignorance and vice in others, faced misunderstanding or endured persecution ; if we strive by their example to nerve ourselves for the same arena in which they have fought before ; should we, or rather can we, refrain from asking for them and for ourselves, 'What advantageth it?'

To this question the Apostle saw one answer only. It is difficult to conceive any other. If

<sup>1</sup> See note B.

<sup>2</sup> Seneca, *Epist.* 96, 'vivere militare est'.

the dead rise not, then these unselfish struggles, these lifelong labours, are mere vanity; then the world's chief benefactors are its greatest losers. It is folly to forego present advantage, to incur present reproach, to sacrifice this life, if there is no life beyond the grave. Then it were better, like those reckless citizens of Judah, who in the presence of a dangerous foe gave themselves up to feasting and revelry, to live only for the moment and cast no thought beyond; then the motto adopted by them and by pleasure-seekers in every age is after all the golden rule of life; 'Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die<sup>1</sup>.'

For, though we stifle the voice, it will still make itself heard. Humanity cannot be thus forcibly repressed. A religion or a philosophy, which neglects this elemental instinct of our nature, which holds out no rewards, stands self-condemned. It is an irresistible impulse which leads to the question, 'What advantageth it?' which suggests the train of thought, 'Why stand I in jeopardy every hour?'

And yet a voice equally clear proclaims in still more commanding tones, that self-denial is better than self-indulgence; that it is noble and good to devote ourselves to the advancement of truth and to works of love; that it is noblest and best of all to pursue this course in

<sup>1</sup> Is. xxii. 13 quoted by St Paul in the text.

the teeth of opposition and obloquy, 'enduring the cross and despising the shame,' reaping no reward on this side the grave. We cannot call such men fools; we respect and admire them; we desire to be like them; we envy their courage, their perseverance, their lofty self-devotion.

The resurrection of the dead, the life to come, is the only solution of the perplexity, the sole harmonizer of these two conflicting voices. And accordingly, as the human race progressed in culture, as the moral faculties were more fully developed, the doctrine of man's immortality became more and more prominent.

Yet still it remained a speculative opinion, a vague yearning, a shadowy hope. At length the signal was vouchsafed. The Son of Man rose from the grave. The doubtful hypothesis became an accredited fact, the settled belief of distant nations, the entailed inheritance of successive ages. To the perplexing question, 'What advantageth it?' a full and final answer was given, 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.'

With this assurance he, whom we mourn to-day, lived and laboured and died. With this assurance we laid him in his grave, looking forward to a joyful resurrection. With this assurance let us all—young and old—now devote

ourselves anew to the service of God in Christ, recalling our baptismal pledges and resolving, as far as in us lies, to make this College a Holy Temple of His Spirit in all sound learning and all godly living.



## NOTES.

A. This refers to a provision of the late Master's will, whereby property (of which the estimated value is between £60,000 and £70,000), consisting of the site and buildings opposite Trinity College together with all the residuary personalty, is conveyed in trust to the College, for the purpose of providing accommodation for its members, and of founding and endowing a Professorship and Studentships of International Law in the University.

B. Robert Wilson Evans, B.D., formerly Fellow and Tutor of Trinity, and sometime Archdeacon of Westmoreland, died on Saturday morning, March 10th (the day of the Master's funeral), aged 76. At the time of his death he held the vicarage of Heversham, in the gift of Trinity College, to which living he was instituted in 1842.

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